



Department of Energy
Carlsbad Field Office
P. O. Box 3090
Carlsbad, New Mexico 88221

March 5, 2014

To Eddy and Lea County Residents:

I am pleased to inform you all of the progress that has been made by our recovery team. Our highly skilled employees and experts from across the Department of Energy (DOE) complex have been working long days to ensure that we continue to move forward. I want to thank our employees and the public for continuing to support the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in our recovery efforts. We have made the commitment to keep you informed of our activities and will do so in a timely manner.

The follow-up testing of the 13 employees who were at the WIPP facility during the February 14 radiation release all came back negative for plutonium and americium, the two radioactive isotopes that were detected in initial sample testing. This indicates that levels were extremely low and the employees are unlikely to experience any serious health effects as a result.

Our ongoing environmental sampling is showing positive trending. The alpha and beta counts continue to decrease and are close to normal levels. The Carlsbad Environmental Monitoring and Research Center (CEMRC), an independent monitoring organization, has collected samples as well, and their results are similar to ours. This was expected since our monitoring stations are in the same locations.

Progress at the WIPP continues daily. A project is underway to completely seal two dampers and eliminate any leakage through them. We are close to sending air monitoring equipment down into the mine to assess the current underground environment. A re-entry team is finishing training so they can plan to safely enter the mine next week. The DOE communicates with the New Mexico Environmental Department (NMED) almost daily. They have granted us a 30-day extension to keep waste packages above ground at the WIPP, which gives us additional time to evaluate options on moving forward with the disposal of the waste.

I want to assure you that we are working diligently to address your questions and concerns. We have not faced this kind of challenge in our 15-year history of waste operations, but I have the utmost confidence in the recovery team. We will carry on providing up to date information through our website and our hotline, 1-800-336-9477. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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Jose R. Franco, Manager
U.S. Department of Energy – Carlsbad Field Office